The Illusion of Maṣlaḥah[1]

Shaykhu-l-Islām Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ibn Taymīyah[2] {رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ}[3]:

"The ***Sharīʿah*** [the divinely revealed law] never neglects any ***Maṣlaḥah*** [true benefit, welfare] whatsoever. Rather, Allāh {تَعَالَى} has perfected for us the ***Dīn*** [religion] and completed the favor upon us. Thus, there is nothing that draws one nearer to ***al-Jannah*** [Paradise] except that the Prophet ﷺ has already informed us of it. And he left us upon ***al-Bayḍā'*** [the clear and radiant way], whose night is like its day. None deviates from it after him except one who is ruined.

However, whatever the intellect deems to be a ***Maṣlaḥah*** [true benefit, welfare], while the ***Sharʿ*** [the revealed law] has not expressly come with it, one of two matters must necessarily apply to it: either the ***Sharʿ*** has indicated it in a way not known to the one considering the matter, **or else it is not truly a *Maṣlaḥah*, even if he believes it to be so.** For a ***Maṣlaḥah*** is that benefit whose advantage is actual or predominant. People frequently imagine that a thing is beneficial in matters of ***Dīn*** [religion] and ***Dunyā*** [worldly life], whereas its benefit is outweighed by its harm, just as Allāh {تَعَالَى} said concerning ***Khamr*** [intoxicants] and ***Maysir*** [games of chance]:

قُلْ فِيهِمَا إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَإِثْمُهُمَا أَكْبَرُ مِنْ نَفْعِهِمَا

Say: In them is great sin and some benefit for people, but their sin is greater than their benefit. (*Sūrah al-Baqarah* **2:219**)

And much of what people have innovated in the way of doctrines and practices, from the innovations of the ***Ahl al-Kalām*** [the people of speculative theology], the ***Ahl at-Taṣawwuf*** [the people of Sufism], the ***Ahl ar-Raʾy*** [the people of personal opinion], and the ***Ahl al-Mulk*** [the people of dominion and political power], they supposed to be a benefit or an interest, something beneficial, true, and correct, while it was not so. Rather, many of those who have departed from Islam, among the Jews, the Christians, the polytheists, the ***Ṣābiʾīn*** (Sabians) and the ***Majūsīyin*** (Zoroastrians), suppose that much of what they adhere to in the way of beliefs, dealings, and acts of worship is a ***Maṣlaḥah*** [benefit, welfare] for them in religion and worldly life.

الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعْيُهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا

Those whose efforts have been wasted in this life while they thought that they were acquiring good by their deeds. (*Sūrah al-Kahf* **18:104**)

Their evil conduct has been adorned for them, and thus they perceived it as good. Hence, when a person judges as good what is in reality evil, his ***Istiḥsān*** [deeming something to be good] or ***Istiṣlāḥ*** [presumption of benefit] may fall under this heading.

This is unlike those who rejected the truth even though their souls were inwardly certain of it, out of wrongdoing and arrogance. For the domain of knowingly denying the truth and arrogantly resisting it is not the same as the domain of ignorance of the truth and blindness to it. Among the disbelievers there are both kinds, and likewise among the ***Ahl al-Ahwāʾ*** [people following their blameworthy desires and deviance] among the Muslims there exist these two categories."

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[1] *This title has been supplied for ease of reference and does not appear as an original heading in the cited passage.*

[2] Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm b. Taymīyah (661H / 728H — 1268 / 1328). The *Shaykh* who, to this very day, leaves a profound impression on anyone who reads his books. He is considered one of the oceans of knowledge that the Muslims have had. His status as a noble, upright, and intelligent *Shaykh* was so lofty and undisputed that even his opponents and adversaries praised him for his resoluteness, integrity, and knowledge.

[3] :{رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ}

Written in transcription as *Raḥimahullāh*, is typically a *Duʿāʾ* (supplication) written or recited after mentioning the name of a deceased Muslim. In terms of meaning, translators often choose '*May Allāh have mercy on him*.'

[4] The "ʿH" (in Arabic: ʿهـ) is an abbreviation for هِجْرَة (*Hijrah*/Emigration). It refers to the year in which the Prophet ﷺ emigrated to Medina (tr. *al-Madīnah an-Nabawīyah*). As Muslims, we adhere to our own calendar whenever possible, known in Arabic as التَّقْوِيمُ الْهِجْرِيُّ (tr. *at-Taqwīm al-Hijrī*).